



# LOCAL FLAVOR

Sustainable, seasonal and domestic fare is at the heart of Monroe-native Cory Bahr's culinary pursuits

BY **Ashley McLellan**

PHOTOS BY **Romero & Romero**

**CHEF CORY BAHR IS A CULINARY** shooting star. The Monroe native's extensive resume continues to grow, and includes a thriving catering business, a new restaurant, multiple national accolades, volunteer work throughout the state and TV appearances on Food Network's "Chopped" and "Food Network Star."

Like all good Louisiana boys, Chef Bahr cites his Southern upbringing and family lessons as the inspiration for his success.

"I was raised by my grandparents and they instilled a sense of hospitality and graciousness in me at a young age," he says. "I was always underfoot in the kitchen with my grandparents, so really my fondest memories of growing up were spent in the kitchen around the table so it's just a natural progression for me to be in the hospitality industry."

Community and his love of the outdoors remain essential to his take on culinary matters.

"Sustainability is at the forefront of everything we do; by building close relationships with our purveyors were able to assure that we are only using domestic seafood. We tend to offer only things that are in season and regional, that creates more work for us on the front end it's definitely something that makes an impact not only with our diners but also with our local and state economy."

Bahr brought his Louisiana love to an even wider audience as a finalist on this summer's "Food Network Star," although he remains ever humble. "The 'Food Network Star' experience was amazing," he says. "It allowed me to share my culinary point of view with the world."

Catch him while you can: Chef Cory Bahr's star is definitely on the rise. His latest venture, Parish restaurant — a modern Southern restaurant featuring a wood-fire kettle — is set to open in Monroe, late fall 2017. ■



## LOUISIANA SHRIMP AND WATERMELON AGUACHILE

Combine **1 pound (10/15 count) Louisiana shrimp** (peeled, deveined and poached), **3 cups seedless watermelon** (cut into half-inch cubes), **1 jalapeño** (stemmed, seeded and roughly chopped), **1 tablespoon sugar**, **½ cup fresh juice**, **1 cup seedless cucumber** (sliced and a quarter inch thick rounds), **1 cup thinly sliced red onion**, **2 tablespoons whole coriander seed** (crushed), **2 teaspoons Korean chili flakes** and **kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste** in a large mixing bowl. Let marinate for one hour, then fold in **¼ cup packed mint leaves** (roughly chopped) and **¼ cup packed cilantro roughly chopped including stems** (or culantro works nicely as well and it is available in most Asian supermarkets). Serve immediately with **fried tortillas or plantain chips**.

# GRILL GIRL

Pit pioneer Carolyn Huggins Simmons bags burgers to open barbecue joint in Shreveport

BY *Ashley McLellan* PHOTOS BY *Romero & Romero*

**CAROLYN HUGGINS SIMMONS,** chef and owner of Flying Pig BBQ in Shreveport, is a fierce pioneer in the world of barbecue pit masters, a role she is asked about frequently.

“As a female pit master customers are always asking me, ‘Where is your pit master?’” she says. “‘Where’s the guy who smokes your meat?’”

Though Simmons may not match the traditional vision of a barbecue master, the chef uses that to her advantage.

“I was raised in a very conservative family where girls don’t grill, so I am completely self-taught,” says Simmons. “This worked in my favor because I developed my own techniques.”

Those techniques were developed and honed through years of travel and experiences Simmons gained throughout her early life.

“I was raised in a military family and as a child I would sit in the kitchens of military wives from countries like Germany, Thailand and Japan,” she says. “I was fascinated with the flavors and smells. These amazing women gave me my first cooking lessons.”

Slow-cooked meats are the main feature of Flying Pig’s menu. Eager diners load up on sweet tea brined chicken, pulled pork, coffee-cured brisket and homemade barbecue sauces and pickles.

“I focus on simple foods made with high-quality ingredients and use local whenever it’s available,” she says. “People eat with their eyes, so I make sure that every plate is colorful and looks like a work of art.”

No stranger to the classic Southern culinary world, Simmons won the 2015 Better Burger Project, a national competition hosted by the James Beard Foundation. That win solidified her place as a chef, and may have prompted the move to open Flying Pig BBQ.

“I recently closed my restaurant Blue Southern Comfort because I made this great burger topped with candied bacon and it was all people would order,” she says. “I had to reopen under the new name Flying Pig BBQ to get the burger off the menu. It’s been six months and I still have PTSD from the thousands of burgers I have cooked in the past five years.” ■

“My holiday traditions? Get the family together on Christmas Eve and have a casual dinner that’s easy to fix because the next day the meal is a full day of cooking,” she says. “Brisket is perfect; just let it smoke all day and pig out in the evening.”



## SMOKED BRISKET RECIPE

Trim **one 10-12 pound whole beef brisket** of excess fat, but leave ½ of fat layer. Mix **¼ cup instant espresso coffee, ¼ cup salt, 3 teaspoon granulated garlic** and coat all sides of brisket. Put brisket in 250 F smoker. Cook until meat reaches 145 to 150 F internal temperature. Remove meat from smoker and completely wrap in 2 layers of foil. Return brisket to smoker and smoke until the internal temperature reaches 190 F. Remove and let rest at least 1 hour. Enjoy.



## FROM THE SOUL

Shreveport Chef Eleazar Mondragon adds a heavy dose of love to dishes at Ki' Mexico

BY *Ashley McLellan*

PHOTOS BY *Romero & Romero*

**CHEF ELEAZAR MONDRAGON'S TAKE** on modern Mexican at Ki' Mexico is comfort food at its finest and is deeply inspired by friends, family and love.

"This might sound corny, but [it's all about] the love for food," he says. "How it brings family or friends together, how versatile it is, and how beautiful and colorful fruit and vegetables can be and what can I prepare with them. I also think it's in my blood, since I come from a family of great cooks and also because I'm from Mexico, a country where almost everything revolves around food."

Known for its own brand of "Mexican soul food," with lush plates of handmade tacos, tortugas and a decadent brunch menu on Sundays, Eleazar genuinely cooks from the heart, an experience he hopes his customers feel.

"We just want them to have a great experience," he says. "One customer told me one day 'When I eat at your restaurant, I feel like I'm eating at your house, I feel like if I was eating what your mom made your family for dinner.' And he was right, many of our dishes are recipes from my mom, some of them are mine and all of them are made with love."

Chef Eleazar is constantly at work, making tweaks and improvements, both in the menu and the restaurant, but also on his own skills as a chef.

"My plans are to keep improving myself so I can keep providing new and different food. I like to travel a lot and that helps me to get new ideas to bring to our customers." ■



## TACO CON VEGETALES

In a medium-size pan, drizzle enough **vegetable oil** to coat the bottom and heat until just shimmering. Add **½ small onion (chopped)** and cook until tender; add **1½ tablespoons of garlic** and cook until fragrant, then add **7 ounces of whole shiitake mushrooms** and stir.

With the help of some kitchen scissors, thinly cut **1 pasilla chile pepper** widthwise and add to the mushroom mixture, making sure to stir constantly. Once the mushrooms have cooked, add **2 zucchini squash (small dice)** and cook until tender. Season with **salt** and add **2 tablespoons of chopped epazote (optional)** or **1 teaspoon of chopped thyme**. Stir one more time and turn off the heat. Keep warm.

In a different skillet, pan-roast **1 cup of corn (fresh, cut off cob)** over medium heat. No oil is necessary; just make sure to stir constantly until the corn is done.

**TO SERVE** Heat up the **tortillas**. Add the mushroom and zucchini squash mixture, drizzle some **Mexican cream (as needed)**, add **queso fresco (as needed)**, and finish with some roasted corn.

Eat and enjoy.